

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Snake River Sockeye Monitoring and Habitat Enhancement

**Project No.:** 2007-402-00

**Project Manager:** Brady Allen

**Location:** Blaine and Custer Counties, Idaho

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Shoshone Bannock Tribe of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation to collect field data on population size, fecundity, spawning, juvenile production, and migration of Snake River sockeye salmon and kokanee; and to enhance nutrient values in Sawtooth Valley lakes to increase productivity for forage organisms for this fish.

Data would be collected annually by conducting snorkel and boat surveys; and hydro-acoustic surveys from a boat in Pettit, Alturas, and Redfish Lakes; and by operating a rotary screw trap in Alturas Lake Creek. Juvenile fish would be trapped and PIT-tagged at the screw trap. Destructive sampling of 30 adult kokanee from Alturas Lake Creek and Fishhook Creek (off of Redfish Lake) would be conducted annually. The screw trap would be installed annually by hand along the creek shore or in Alturas Lake Creek using hand tools only.

Forage productivity would be enhanced by adding agricultural-grade nitrogen and (mostly) phosphorous to Sawtooth Valley lakes following the protocols and authorizations by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, and the Snake River Sockeye Salmon Technical Oversight Committee. Nutrients would be added by broadcasting from a boat.

The location of these activities would occur at the locations shown in Table 1.

*Table 1 Locations of proposed activity*

<b>Location and activity</b>	<b>Latitude</b>	<b>Longitude</b>
Alturas Lake	43.913834	-114.860090
Pettit Lake	43.979903	-114.877108
Redfish Lake	44.125149	-114.927343
Alturas Lake Creek	43.985871	-114.842857
Fishhook Creek	44.143537	-114.920833

Funding for these actions fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp). It also assists Bonneville in mitigating for effects of development and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the Columbia River and its tributaries, under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 USC § 839b(h)(10)(A)).

**Findings:** In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, Jul. 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

- 1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
- 2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- 3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Robert W. Shull

Robert W. Shull  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel  
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel  
NEPA Compliance Officer

November 9, 2020

Date

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

## **Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist**

This checklist documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

**Proposed Action:** Snake River Sockeye Monitoring and Habitat Enhancement

### **Project Site Description**

These activities are located in high mountain lakes and their inlet and outlet streams in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. They are generally surrounded by conifer forests or talus slopes. Expansive forests and high mountain peaks form the visual backdrop for each lake with high-elevation sagebrush vegetative communities not far downslope. The lakes range in size from 1,500 acres and 387 feet deep (Redfish Lake) to 400 acres and over 600 feet deep (Pettit Lake), and are at elevations between 6,500 to 7,000 ft. Water quality in these lakes and creeks is very high. Recreation use is high at all lakes, and campgrounds, trailheads, boat launches, recreational summer homes, and resorts are present around about ½ of each of their shores.

The screw trap location in Alturas Lake Creek would be located on private land within an expansive open meadow with scattered large willows along the streambanks.

### **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

#### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: None of the actions disturb any ground surface nor remove any surface features. The actions have no potential to affect historic or cultural resources.

#### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: None of the actions disturb any ground surface. Geology and soils would not be affected.

#### **3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: None of the actions disturb any ground surface or remove vegetation. There would likely be some vegetation impacted (trampled) by foot traffic and overland hauling of the screw trap at Alturas Lake Creek, but no plants would be cut or removed. No ESA-listed or "special-status" plant species are present in this location.

#### **4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No riparian or upland habitats would be modified by these actions since no soil or plants would be impacted. Wildlife would be disturbed by human activities, but this impact would be temporal (one day or less per action at each site) and minimal.

Wolverine (until recently under consideration by the USFWS for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)) and lynx (classified as Threatened under ESA) could be present around each of these lakes, but human recreational activity here is already high and the incremental disturbance from these proposed actions would be inconsequential. Their presence near enough to the proposed activity for them to be disturbed would be very unlikely, and there would thus be no effect on either. This was affirmed for lynx by USFWS in their biological opinion on bull trout cited below (01EIFW00-2017-F-0819).

#### **5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No lake or creek would be physically altered by these actions; stream banks and beds would be undisturbed, as would lake bottoms and shores. However, the water chemistry of the lakes would be altered with the proposed nutrient enhancement. This action is designed to enhance primary production of aquatic organisms in these nutrient-poor, high-mountain lakes to mitigate for the loss of marine-derived nutrients since the large reduction of anadromous fish runs over the past 150 years. Nutrient enhancement would take place under the regulatory oversight and permitting action of the State of Idaho, and the scientific oversight of the Snake River Sockeye Technical Oversight Committee, whose purpose is to restore sockeye runs to these lakes. The enhancement would increase forage species for fish, and would thereby improve habitat for aquatic species in the lakes and in their outlet creeks.

ESA-listed Snake River sockeye salmon, Snake River spring Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout are all listed under ESA and occupy the creeks and lakes affected by these actions, which are likely to adversely affect Snake River sockeye salmon through disturbance, trapping, handling, and PIT-tagging; and to disturb bull trout by the incidental trapping and handling. Consultations with NMFS (NWR-2013-10541) and USFWS (01EIFW00-2017-F-0819) have been completed on the proposed actions with Biological Opinions signed in September 2013 and December 2017, respectively. All actions would be conducted in compliance with the terms and conditions of those consultations and the authorized "take" associated with these actions would be reported annually as required.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Riparian wetlands are present along the shores of Alturas Lake Creek near where the screw trap would be installed. No soil would be disturbed, but plants may be trampled by foot traffic during annual installation of the trap. There would be no effect to wetland structure or function, but some individual wetland plants may be damaged. Effects to wetlands would be inconsequential.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: These actions have no potential to impact groundwater or aquifers. They do not withdraw water from either surface or ground sources. The operation of motor boats and trucks may have short-term potential to impact water quality slightly from possible fuel or other fluid drips or spills, but this would be minor and of minimal effect.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change to land uses. These actions are primarily on National Forest System lands, though the screw trap located on private lands, and the ongoing public recreational and private ranching activities would not be impacted. The actions are consistent with the land-use designations and the Standards and Guidelines for activities on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The sampling and nutrient enhancement actions would have no impact to visual quality since no soil or vegetation would be disturbed; and the use of boats and proposed snorkeling would be consistent with the recreational activities common in these lakes. However, the screw trap would introduce a foreign-looking structure into a natural setting, which could detract from the middle-ground scenery in the area. This effect to scenic values is minimal, since it is located over 300 feet from the access road to Pettit Lake (the only location from which the trap would be visible by the public). It is not in the foreground and is obscured for much of the road-travel time by large willows along the creek. Also, it is not alone as a constructed feature evident along this travel route, and is of similar scale and appearance as fencing and watering structures nearby.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Driving of trucks and operation of motor boats would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term, and consistent with that produced by recreational and local ranching and agricultural activities.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise sources would be from trucks and operation of motor boats. Noise would be consistent with that produced by local recreation and ranching and agricultural activities, and would be short term. These impacts would occur during daylight hours only.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No long-term public safety hazards would be created with this project. Routine, short-term, safety hazards would be expected from the incremental addition of vehicle traffic on local roads, and the additional boat traffic on the lakes.

### Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

**Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.**

Explanation: N/A

**Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.**

Explanation: N/A

**Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.**

Explanation: N/A

**Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.**

Explanation: N/A

### Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The actions would occur primarily on National Forest System lands, and would be under Special Use Authorization by the Sawtooth National Forest granted to the Shoshone Bannock tribe as permit holder. The screw trap is located on private lands by permission of the landowner, negotiated by Shoshone Bannock Tribe personnel.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: /s/ Robert W. Shull November 9, 2020  
Robert W. Shull Date  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
CorSource Technology Group